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AUTHOR Williams, Mary B.
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ABSTRACT

Home economists in vocational education are viewed as a diverse group of educators qualified to implement education for character concentrating on values that will remain with students in tomorrow's world of work. Educators should consider making a wholehearted commitment to teaching moral values and developing good character in students. A few years back many schools opted to take a neutral stand on the question: should the schools teach values? In the 'nineties more and more schools are for an affirmative answer to this question because of concerns about increasing moral problems in society, especially the disturbing rise in youth violence. As educators train students in job skills through vocational education, they must also guide the acceptance of moral values and development of strong character. Character has three interrelated parts: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior. Educators who hope to build character must take a comprehensive, embracing approach to values education that includes all phases of school life. A recommended comprehensive approach includes 12 strategies: act as caregiver, model, and mentor; create a moral community in the classroom; practice moral discipline; create a democratic classroom environment; teach values through the curriculum; use cooperative learning; develop the "conscience of craft"; encourage moral reflection; teach conflict resolution; foster caring beyond the classroom; create a positive moral culture in the school; and recruit parents and the community as partners in values education. (YLB)

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American Vocational Association
86th Annual Convention
Adams Mark Hotel
December 4-8, 1992

Presentation for
National Association of Vocational Home Economics
Local Supervisors

Title

A Place For Character Education In Home Economics

Monday, 12/7/92
3:30 p.m.

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Mary B. Williams
Supervisor, Home Economics Education
St. Louis Public Schools

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Convention Theme: "VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: PREPARING A WORLD CLASS WORKFORCE"

Theme: "Preparing Today's Students For Tomorrow's World" on behalf of NALSVHE

Monday, December 7 - 3:30 - 5:00 p.m.

Topic #3 A Place For Character Education In Home Economics

The emphasis of this presentation today is not values in general (for these values include such things as a career choice) but rather the emphasis will relate to moral values such as respect and responsibility.

As a Certified Home Economist serving the St. Louis Public Schools in the inner-city, I coordinate three major programs. (1) Home Economics Supervisor (which involves curriculum development and teacher supervision for 36 Home Economics Teachers.) (2) Coordinator for the Personal Growth, Development and Responsibility Program, a K-8 program which addresses three components - Character Education, Human Sexuality and Decision Making. (3) District Representative to PREP - Personal Responsibility Education Program. PREP is a school-business-community program organized to develop and strengthen the students' character, responsibility and achievement skills.

Please note that while working as home economics teacher and supervisor, my intentions were to devote the bulk of my time to the field of home economics education. Supprisedly I was appointed by the Associate Superintendent of Curriculum and Programs to hold responsibility for the aforementioned programs which address character education and personal responsibility.

Let's take a look at ourselves in a rearview mirror, the present and the future - the scenario reflects the vision of home economics education being viewed as instructors who are role models of some expectations parents and the community see for their children. Self-Esteem - Responsibility - Self-Control - Respect - Honesty - Reliability - Commitment - Responsible Decision-Making - Cooperation - Courage - Healthy Lifestyles - Perseverance. Do we not also teach and reinforce these concepts as we address our curriculum in the areas of Personal Development, and Family Relations, Consumer Education as well as sending the message of Ethical Decision-Making strands throughout our total vocational and occupational programs.

We can assume that deep respect has been gained for our profession when we as home economists in vocational education are viewed as a diverse group of educators qualified to implement education for character concentrating on values that will hopefully remain with our students in tomorrow's world of work.

To focus on our theme: "PREPARING TODAY'S STUDENTS FOR TOMORROW'S WORLD", educators of the nineties should consider making a wholehearted commitment to teaching moral values and developing good character in our students.

Quote: Bill Honig, Superintendent of Public Instruction, California. The pendulum is swinging back from the romantic idea that all societal values are oppressive. But educators went along with all this craziness, so we've ended up with students who are ethically illiterate.

The big question: Should the schools teach values? The status of this debateable issue has changed because the pluralism of peoples's diverse values has gotten out-of-hand. A few years back many schools opted to take a neutral stand to stay out of trouble. Education in the nineties is experiencing a swift change in school systems across the country to address values and character development, because of increasing moral problems in society which range from greed and dishonesty to violent crime and self-destructive behaviors such as drug abuse and suicide. Parents, community and business, liberals and conservatives are summoning educators to assist with the charge of establishing some basic values in their children.

Of all the moral problems that have fueled this concern, none has been more disturbing than rising youth violence. From 1978 to 1988, according to FBI statistics, rape arrests for 13- and 14-year old males nearly doubled. Over a 20-year period (1968 to 1988), there was a 53 percent increase in all violent crime - murder, rape, robbery, and assault - for males and females seventeen or under. Moreover, juvenile crimes of violence, often carried out by kid-next-door teenagers, have of late combined new lows in brutality with a seeming total lack of conscience or remorse.

For example: Five teenagers in affluent Glen Ridge, New Jersey - including two brothers who were cocaptains of high school football team - were arrested and charged with sexually

assaulting a 17 year-old mentally retarded girl in the basement of the brothers' home. Eight other teenagers watched.

There is today a widespread, deeply unsettling sense that children are changing - in ways that tell us much about ourselves as a society. And these changes are reflected not just in the violent extremes of teenage behavior but in the everyday speech and actions of younger children as well. In New Orleans, a boy in first grade shaves chalk and passes it around the classroom, pretending it is cocaine. In a small town in upstate New York, a first-grade boy leans over and asks the girl in the next row, "Are you a virgin?"

The most basic kinds of moral knowledge seems to be disappearing from our common culture. Even as we face concerns as those aforementioned, controversy continues to exist on whether or not schools should address moral values. I contend that schools must make a positive contribution to the young and the <u>moral health</u> of the Nation.

SUMMING UP THE CASE FOR VALUES EDUCATION

As we envision the lives of our students with prepared skills for the 21st century we must realize that as we train for job skills through vocational education we must also guide the acceptance of moral values and development of strong character.

Ten good reasons:

1. There is an urgent need for moral and spiritual renewal when young people are hurting themselves and others while caring less about another human being's welfare.

2. Transmitting values is and always has been the work of civilization. A society needs values education both to survive and to thrive. In taking up values education, schools are returning to their time-honored role, abandoned briefly in the middle part of this century. Home - Church - School.

3. The school's role as moral educator becomes even more vital at a time when millions of children get little moral teaching from their parents and where value-centered influences such as church or temple are also absent from their lives.

4. There is common ethical ground even in our value-conflicted society. Americans have intense and often angry differences over moral issues. Despite this diversity, we can identify basic, shared values of a pluralistic society.

5. Democracies have a special need for moral education because democracy is government by the people themselves. Care about rights of others.

6. There is no such thing as value-free education. Everything a school does teaches values - including the way teachers and other adults treat students, the way the principal treats teachers,m the way the school treats parents, and the

way students are allowed to treat school staff and each other.

7. The great questions facing both the individual person and the human race are moral questions. One question of utmost importance is "How shall I live my life?" For all humanity the most important question facing us for the next century is "How can we live with each other?"

8. There is broad-based, growing support for values education in the schools. It comes from the federal government, which has identified values education as essential in the fight against drugs and crime. It comes from statehouses, which have passed resolutions calling upon all school districts to teach the values necessary for good citizenship and a law-abiding society. It comes from business, which recognizes that a responsible labor force requires workers who have character traits of honesty, dependability, pride in work, and the capacity to cooperate with others.

9. An unabashed commitment to moral education is essential if we are to attract and keep good teachers. The experience can be devastating with the deteriorating moral fiber of some students and the lack of effective methods to counter this trend.

10. Values education is a doable job. Given the enormous moral problems facing the country, their deep social roots, and the ever-increasing responsibilities that schools already shoulder, the prospect of taking on moral education can seem overwhelming. The god news, as we will see, is that values education can be done within the school day, is happening now in school systems all across the country, and is making a positive difference in the moral attitudes and behavior of students, with the result that it's easier for teachers to teach and students to learn.

WHAT IS GOOD CHARACTER

Good character is what we want for our children and students. Of what does it consist? (Thomas Lickona "Educating for Character) Character consists of <u>operative values</u>, <u>values in action</u>. We progress in our character as a value becomes a virtue, a reliable inner disposition to respond to situations in a morally good way.

Character so conceived has three interrelated parts: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior. Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good - habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action. All three are necessary for leading a moral life; all three make up moral maturity. When we think about the kind of character we want for our students, it's clear that we want them to be able to judge what is right, care deeply about what is right, and then do what they believe to be right - even in the face of pressure from without and temptation from within.

Character doesn't function in a vacuum; it functions in a social environment. Often that environment suppresses moral concerns. For example sometimes many people feel foolish doing the "moral thing." If schools wish to develop character they must provide a moral environment with emphasis on good values that are on-going and reinforced. It takes a long time for a value to become a virtue. Personal habits of thinking, feeling and acting are just as important as intellectual development. The whole school environment must be conducive to supporting the moral growth of our students. Respect, responsibility and their derivatives are the values that schools may legitimately teach.

AN APPROACH FOR TEACHING RESPECT AND RESPONSIBILITY

As schools continue to be faced with deteriorating social fabric, educators that hope to build character must take a comprehensive, embracing approach to values education that

include all phases of school life to foster character development. A recommended comprehensive approach may include 12 strategies as outlined here:

1. **Act as caregiver, model, and mentor,** treating students with love and respect, setting a good example, supporting prosocial behavior, and correcting hurtful actions.

2. **Create a moral community in the classroom,** helping students know each other, respect and care about each other, and feel valued membership in the group.

3 **Practice moral discipline,** using the creation and enforcement of rules as opportunities to foster moral reasoning, self-control, and a generalized respect for others.

4. **Create a democratic classroom environment,** involving students in decision-making and shared responsibility for making the classroom a good place to be and to learn.

5. **Teach values through the curriculum,** using academic subjects as a vehicle for examining ethical issues. (This is simultaneously a schoolwide strategy when the curriculum addresses cross-grade concerns such as sex, drug, and alcohol education.)

6. **Use cooperative learning** to teach children the disposition and skills of helping each other and working together.

7. **Develop the "conscience of craft"** by fostering students' academic responsibility and their regard for the value of learning and work.

8. **Encourage moral reflection** through reading, writing, discussion, decision-making exercises, and debate.

9. **Teach conflict resolution** so that students have the capacity and commitment to solve conflicts in fair, nonviolent ways.

A comprehensive approach calls upon the school to:

10. **Foster caring beyond the classroom,** using inspiring role models and opportunities for school and community service to help students learn to care by giving care.

11. **Create a positive moral culture in the school,** developing a total school environment (through the leadership of the principal, schoolwide discipline, a schoolwide sense of community, democratic student government, a moral community

among adults, and time for addressing moral concerns) that supports and amplifies the values taught in classrooms.

12. **Recruit parents and the community as partners in values education,** supporting parents as the child's first moral teacher; encouraging parents to support the school in its efforts to foster good values; and seeking the help of the community (e.g., churches, business, and the media) in reinforcing the values the school is trying to teach.

Schools are capable of teaching good or bad values in everything they do. Every interaction, whether part of the academic curriculum or the human curriculum of rules, roles, and relationships, has the potential to affect a child's values and character for good or for ill. The question is not whether to do values education but whether to do it well.

With that understanding, how can we make all parts of school life work together for the moral growth of our children?

As teachers of vocational education we have a valuable contribution to share in the process of molding strong character with our students for we serve as caregivers, moral models and ethical mentors.

I would like to end with a quote from HAIM GINOTT.

"I have come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom . . . As a teacher, I possess tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, and a child humanized or dehumanized."

We teach who we are.